

LITERATURE REVIEWS

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TWO REVIEWS OF A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW — B

THE CREATION-EVOLUTION CONTROVERSY. R.L. Wysong. 1976. East Lansing, MI: Inquiry Press. 455 p.

Reviewed by R. H. Brown, Director, Geoscience Research Institute

After a thorough and critical reading, I must describe Dr. Wysong's book as the best comprehensive treatment of scientific creationism that has become available prior to mid-1977.

Many readers will appreciate the author's efforts to present a fair treatment of contrasting evolutionary and creationist views. The approach taken throughout the book is to present a set of facts, offer an evolutionary and a creationist interpretation, and leave the reader to decide the relative merits of the interpretations. The extent to which the author's creationist bias is apparent in varying degrees throughout the range of topics he covers is no discredit to his effort to present a fair and balanced treatment. Readers who wish to investigate more fully any of the topics treated by Wysong will appreciate his extensive documentation.

The 138 illustrations, about one for every three pages of basic text, combine with the author's clear, straight-forward style to make the subject material more easily comprehensible than many readers of this type of literature may have thought possible. A number of these illustrations will be useful to individuals who have occasion to present lectures on origins.

Chapters 1 and 2 briefly sketch the influence of evolutionary thought throughout modern society, contrasting the good and the undesirable consequences that may be attributed to both the creationist and the non-theistic evolutionary models. Wysong proposes the interesting viewpoint that creation and contrasting evolution models are theories of human behavior. From his experience as a veterinarian he observes that attempts to correct social ills, like attempts to correct physical ills, will depend for success on having a correct model for diagnosis.

Chapter 3 gives a survey of the possibilities for explaining life on Earth, and also provides good discussions on the nature of reality, the need for open-minded investigation to find a solid basis for truth, and

the difference between hypothesis, theory and law; between philosophy and science.

Individuals who have had difficulty grasping probability considerations regarding the abiotic formation of biochemicals will appreciate the treatment given in Chapter 5. The discussion in paragraph 2 on p 78 would be more consistent, and the effort required by the reader minimized, if the number 24 rather than 16 were used for the number of coin flips required to realize the 1/8 chance of getting heads three times in a row.

Chapter 6 provides an excellent discussion on the origin and development of DNA in biological systems. Some difficulty in following this discussion may be caused by the confusion of probability with number of molecules at the beginning of paragraph 2 on p 115. The opening sentence should read, "...10^{89,190} DNA molecules," not 1/10^{89,190}. This and the following chapter provide a more complete and more accurate treatment of probability considerations related to the origin of life than has been previously available in the creationist literature.

Much sound evidence for a short history of the life-support system provided by planet Earth is given in Chapter 10. One of the best lines of evidence is that provided by river deltas (p 163).¹ Unfortunately, the author's treatment of geology, geochemistry and radiometric dating is principally based on uncritical borrowing from previous creationist literature and does not compare with his handling of philosophy, molecular biology and genetics. For instance, at the bottom of p 153 it is stated that most radiometric dates are not "scientific." Any carefully determined radiometric data (age) are scientific, irrespective of its interpretation in terms of real time. The "error" (p 154) in most cases is not in the radiometric dates but in the *interpretations* in terms of real time.

In the discussion on biogenesis and spontaneous generation in Chapter 11 the author presents an interesting treatment of the problem posed by extension of the law of biogenesis to the Creator. The nature of the Creator's existence and the on-going relationship between Creator and creation are confronted in a helpful philosophical discussion which continues into the following chapter. There the question is raised, Is life a property of matter, or matter a property of life?

Subsequently the author returns to a consideration of biopolymer formation, with an excellent, easily understood qualitative treatment. The prebiotic atmosphere necessary for evolutionary models of origin and a discussion of both the evolutionist and creationist views regarding thermodynamic arguments related to origins are well presented.

Three chapters are devoted to a discussion of biological variation. A choice collection of authoritative quotations on the genetic aspect of evolution is given, as well as an excellent discussion of the "survival of

the fittest” principle, including an imposing list of negative examples for “natural selection.”

The question concerning circular reasoning in geology is treated in Chapter 20, which contains a choice selection of quotations from authorities who affirm that paleontological criteria are the basis for determining the time sequence of geologic strata.

Critical readers of this book will often be perplexed to determine whether a parenthetical statement within a quotation is a comment by Wysong or part of the original text which is being quoted. The book would have benefited from the services of a professional editor. The use of *tenant* for *tenet* on p 56, *stalagtites* for *stalactites* on p 172 and the expression “the earth is surrounded by thousands of square miles of sedimentary strata” on p 355 provide examples. At times the author indulges a vigorous, unconventional style that will delight some readers, and possibly dismay others. Frequently encountered are non-dictionary terms such as *quantitate*, *complexify*, *complexification*, *multiquadruple-doupleillions*, and *scavengerized*. More serious, perhaps, are unprofessional expressions such as: “keeping his clammy little hands out of the pot,” regarding evolutionist origin-of-life experiments, on p 237; “the second law says it just won’t done ain’t gonna happen” on p 257; “a million billion quintuplatillion umptaplatillion, multuplatillion impossibidillion fantasticatrillion years” on p 347; and “sudden ‘poof!’ creation” on p 411.

Unfortunately the author tends to oversimplify certain concepts and bases some of the “proofs” on either results reported under highly specialized and artificial laboratory circumstances, or on unverified theoretical models. Space does not permit an exhaustive list of some serious technical errors in this book, but I would like to point out a few examples.

Wysong’s discussion of the geomagnetic moment on p 161 involves several hazardous simplifications. The available geomagnetic field data have been collected over a period of only 130 years and must be extrapolated on a strictly uniformitarian basis over ten-fold to obtain the 1400 year half-life estimate. An additional uniformitarian extrapolation of nearly ten-fold must be made to reach the desired conclusion. Linear, exponential or sinusoidal decay can be fitted to the available data. While exponential decay is the preferred choice in Wysong’s discussion, a sinusoid section can give a slightly better fit. Since paleomagnetic evidence establishes beyond question that there have been numerous geomagnetic reversals during the time igneous and sedimentary features have been formed, there is a good possibility that the recent decrease in geomagnetism could

be the initial stage of another reversal, rather than evidence for a unidirectional change throughout Earth history.

The atmospheric helium interpretation given on p 163 does not take adequate account of several facts. Hydrogen is known to escape rapidly from Earth's atmosphere.² Helium escapes from the outer atmosphere in the order of 1/50 as fast as diatomic hydrogen and 1/300 as fast as monatomic hydrogen.³ Earth's atmosphere is 0.934 percent argon which contains nearly 10,000 times more argon-40 than does primordial argon.⁴ The most reasonable explanation for this high concentration of argon-40 is the accumulation of argon-40 produced by potassium-40 radioactivity.

Of the seven plus locations specified on p 373, human footprints in immediate association with dinosaur footprints have been reported for *only* one — the Glen Rose area of Texas. An individual who wishes to utilize this evidence in support of the contemporaneity of men and dinosaurs should make a first-hand observation of the footprint features in the Dinosaur State Park area. The dinosaur footprint evidence there is unquestionable, possibly the best in the world. But a large number of conservative creationists, including many scientists with doctorates, who have studied this area find the presumed evidence for human footprints highly questionable at best. A number of human footprints quarried from the Paluxy River bed have been proven to be carvings made for sale to tourists. Pictures taken of irregularities in the rock that have been wetted by water or oil to obtain better photographic contrast are far more convincing than first-hand observation of the unretouched features. The wetting process introduces subjective bias on the part of the photographer.⁵

One conclusion that the reader of this review may make is that its author is unduly critical. I trust that my readers will consider this review as an effort to be constructive, an effort to place scientific creationism on a more solid scientific base and give it a posture less susceptible to attack by well-informed persons.

A second conclusion that may be reached is that the scope of topics Wysong has attempted to cover is probably too great for a single writer. Creationist writers would do better to confine their efforts to the area(s) in which they have specialized to the extent of attaining adequate competence. The cause of creationism is not well served when one writer (or speaker) in good faith uncritically borrows the weaknesses and errors of another writer. Conviction concerning the truth of creationism, or of a particular model of creationism, does not assure competence to discriminate between good and unsound supporting arguments. A book that attempts the wide scope covered by the *Creation-Evolution Controversy* should be a team effort, or at least should in its development be critiqued by specialists in each of the areas covered.

Finally, it can be observed that there is a firm and ample scientific basis for a creation model of origins in contrast with a non-theistic evolutionary model. But a corresponding firm and ample scientific basis for the traditional Hebrew-Christian short chronology view of planet Earth as a life support system does not exist, at least at present. Claims that the scientific evidence, *of itself*, inductively leads to the short-chronology inherent in a straightforward grammatical-historical reading of the Bible should be expected to have a negative effect on unsympathetic scientifically informed individuals. Every effort should be made to develop sound models for relating scientific evidence to a biblically based viewpoint in a manner that will minimize the barriers encountered by scientifically informed individuals who become sympathetic toward this viewpoint, and that also will meet the needs of individuals whose educational experience makes it difficult to retain a biblically based viewpoint. Dr. Wysong is to be commended for the progress he has made toward these goals.

ENDNOTES

1. Coffin HG. 1973. Is the earth millions of years old? *These Times* 82(9):13-19.
2. Snow GE, Javor GT. 1975. Oxygen and evolution. *Origins* 2:59-63.
3. Calculations from equations given by: Hunten DM, Donahue TM. 1976. Hydrogen loss from the terrestrial planets. *Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Science* 4:265-292.
4. Cherdyntsev VV. 1961. *Abundance of chemical elements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p 69-70.
5. Neufeld B. 1975. Dinosaur tracks and giant men. *Origins* 2:64-76.